

# **WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

## **Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century**

### **Vision and Action**

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#### **VOLUME V – PLENARY**

##### **African Development Bank**

Note1: To meet UNESCO publishing standards, some editing of papers has been required.

Note2: Authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in signed articles and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

African Development Bank

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**Speech of Ms Zeinab El-Bakri  
Director,  
Department of Human Resources  
African Development Bank**

Mr. Secretary - General  
Mr. President  
Your Excellencies, Ministers of Education  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to begin by first extending the best wishes and support of Mr. Omar Kabbaj, President of the African Development Bank Group for the success of this conference. At the Bank we are increasingly convinced that support to higher education systems in Africa constitutes an integral part of the development of the continent's human resources, and is as a consequence, tantamount to investing in Africa's future. In this regard, the Bank Group appreciates the relentless efforts made by UNESCO in supporting education and development on our continent. The Bank Group has had, and continues to maintain a longstanding and close co-operation and excellent relationships with UNESCO, allow me to further assure you ladies and gentlemen that this relationship and co-operation will continue to the benefit of the African continent.

The Bank Group views the strengthening of Africa's human resources as a key element in the continent's strive towards sustainable development. Thus, since the mid-1970s the Bank has placed increased emphasis on education sector lending aimed at promoting Africa's human resource development. The first Bank education sector policy dates to 1986. However, cognisant of the numerous challenges facing Africa's education systems and the changing priorities with regard to educational investments in its Regional Member Countries, the Bank Group has found it necessary to re-examine its earlier policy document. The current policy development exercise which is ongoing and during which assistance from UNESCO has been gratefully received, involves a serious evaluation of past Bank experience with support and lending to the education sector. In addition, it seeks to develop a strategic framework for enhancing Bank Group dialogue and co-operation with the RMCs and with bi-lateral, multilateral and non-governmental organizations active on the education scene in Africa.

The 1986 policy paper had identified three priority areas as most in need of Bank Group support. These were: basic education (primary and non-formal education), labour power development (technical/vocational training, teacher training etc) and institutional development (support to education management and administration, financial administration, assessments of the education sector.)

During the last 22 years, the Bank group has made appreciable impact on the development of African education. First, the construction, rehabilitation, equipping and furnishing of all types and levels of education institutions has contributed to the overall expansion of educational opportunity especially at the primary and secondary levels, contributing globally to the reduction of regional and social inequalities in access to educational opportunities.

Second, Bank Group interventions such as the training of education personnel and provision of relevant physical facilities and education materials have contributed to the enhancement of the quality of education offered in the RMCs.

Third, institutional support programmes targeting Ministries of Education in the form of relevant infrastructure, technical assistance and training of personnel have strengthened the respective MOEs institutional capacity.

The Bank Group will continue its support to the education sector in order to enhance the RMCs human resources base as well as a measure to improve individual welfare and to reduce poverty. This commitment is clearly outlined in various Bank documents including: The Strategic Framework for Bank Group Operations 1997-2001 and the ADF VII Lending Policy and will most likely continue under the ADF VIV currently under negotiations.

However, in view of lessons drawn from its past experience, the Bank will be guided by two main principles. The first of these is the recognition of specific challenges to be faced by Africa as it enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These challenges can only be handled through commensurate comprehensive reforms in Africa's education systems, which lay an emphasis on improved quality. These challenges include: the reality of globalization, together with an emphasis on regional integration; the increased importance of science and technology, increased competitiveness as a result of which the private sector's role is becoming more central in all spheres of life, and improved governance systems. There is, thus a clear need for the RMCs to refocus much more than ever on reforming their respective education systems in order to more effectively address these challenges.

A second guiding principle is the situation analysis of the African education scene, which has resulted in tailoring Bank interventions to fit the educational needs of the various RMCs. In this regard, since basic education is still a priority for a substantial number of RMCs, investments in physical infrastructure for education will be continued by the Bank. In fact, this can be said to be one of the comparative advantages of the Bank, since it has been particularly successful in strengthening the RMCs primary, general secondary and vocational/technical education sub-sectors. However, the Bank increasingly sees the need to also support programmes of other sub-sectors which play a supportive role to these levels of education and which are crucial for sustainable development of Africa, especially in countries which are close to achieving Universal Primary Education. It is here that the Bank will increasingly be interested in supporting the higher education sub-sector. Our interest lies in reforming higher education systems in Africa, which have for long suffered from neglect, especially in the areas of science and technology. In this regard, the Bank will be shortly engaging in dialogue with several of its RMCs, in view of potential assistance to the sub-sector in these countries.

Having said that however, it should be stated that a further interest of the Bank in view of its regional integration mandate is to support multinational higher education projects. In this regard, the Bank intends to undertake a study during 1999 on higher education in francophone countries of West Africa with the objective of diagnosing the situation and principal problems faced by higher education in the sub-region. The ultimate objective of the study is to identify potential areas for support whether on a national or sub-regional level.

Before closing, allow me once again ladies and gentlemen to express our support to the deliberations of the conference and to the recommendations resulting from it.

Thank You.